



Cpl. Alisha R. Fitzgerald
Laverne Johnson, civilian fabric worker/sewing machine mechanic for the Depot Fabric Repair Shop, stitches a recruit training platoon guidon at the shop Tuesday. Johnson has been working at the shop for 11 years.

Fabric repair workers weave esprit de corps

CPL. ALISHA R. FITZGERALD
STAFF WRITER

In a tiny room above Depot Laundry, three individuals function behind-the-scenes as one of Parris Island’s most integral units.

From recruit training platoons to personal keepsakes, the Fabric Repair Shop is responsible for creating every guidon that flies aboard the Depot.

“We are very important to Depot operations,” said Laverne Johnson, civilian fabric worker/sewing machine mechanic for the shop. “The flags are like gold to the Marines. If they didn’t have them, it would upset the entire order of things.”

Johnson has been working at the shop for 11 years and has been sewing for more than 20. She works alongside two Marines, who attended a six-week school to specifically train for this particular Military Occupational Specialty.

The three create each guidon from scratch with sizable rolls of gold and red fabric. The material must first be measured and cut. Lines are then drawn on the fabric to mark where platoon numbers, letters or symbols will be placed. Each item to be sewn on must be stenciled, cut and pinned. The material is then taken to one of the shop’s five sewing machines for completion.

From start to finish, the entire process usually takes about an hour, barring any interruptions.

While the shop is able to stay on top of the needed recruit training platoon guidons by tracking with the Depot’s recruit training schedule, guidons ordered by Marines or other Depot personnel for special occasions or personal keepsakes, usually take about three to four weeks to complete, depending on the shop’s workload.

“We slow down a lot during the winter months,” said Cpl. Terry Johnson, fabric repair specialist for the shop. “During the summer, it’s very hectic.”

Although personal requests may take a little longer to fulfill, they are done at no cost to the individual. Those who opt for something besides the standard red and gold can bring in their own material to be sewn.

“We only do [the personal orders] as time permits outside of our primary workload,” said Cpl. Johnson. “But you’d be surprised how many we actually make on a regular basis. A lot of people like giving them to Marines who are leaving or retiring.”

Besides sewing guidons, the shop produces the Depot’s Marine Corps Martial Arts Program’s pugil sticks. They can also repair any damaged bucket issue item.

Although the shop performs other tasks, all who work there agree that the guidons are the truest representation of their importance to Depot operations.

“When I see a platoon marching with their guidon flying, I think, ‘Hey—I did that,’” said Johnson. “It’s a great sense of pride and accomplishment for me.”

Being able to see the fruits of their labor all over the Depot is only one perk to the job, according to Johnson.

“I love to sew, and I like meeting with the people who come in,” she said.

Although one of Johnson’s Marine counterparts admitted to not being quite as speedy as she is on the sewing machine, he appreciates several other aspects about working in the small shop.

“The flexible schedule enables me to get a lot of things done,” said Cpl. Johnson.

Corporal Johnson and the other Marine fabric repair specialist in the shop, Cpl. Corey Daniels, are soon to become a thing of the past. Headquarters Marine Corps has closed out the MOS in preparation for a complete civilian turnover projected for late 2005. This is the only job either of the Marines has performed since enlisting.

For more information on the shop or to put in an order for some of their handiwork, call 228-3194.

Red Cross asks: Are you prepared?

JULIE DIMITROV

AMERICAN RED CROSS

Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. It can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. The best way to make your family and home safer is to prepare before disaster strikes.

The Palmetto Chapter American Red Cross is offering the disaster courses listed below. Learn ways to reduce the effects of disaster and how you can help your community in times of disaster.

Introduction to Disaster: Feb. 12 — gives a behind-the-scenes look at the impact of disasters on people and their communities. You will also meet the people who serve in time of disaster, including American Red Cross paid and volunteer staff, and see how they work together to meet the needs of people affected by disasters.

Mass Care Overview:

Feb. 17 — introduces participants to the role of Mass Care on a disaster relief operation, the services provided by the function, and ways to deliver quality service to clients.

Shelter Operations:

Feb. 19 — prepares Red Cross volunteers to effectively and sensitively manage shelter operations as a team, to meet the needs of people displaced as a result of disaster.

Family Services:

Feb. 26 — introduces the Family Services function. You will learn the skills and tools needed to conduct an effective client interview.

All classes will be held at the Palmetto Chapter Red Cross office, Sheridan Park, in Bluffton, from 6:30 - 9p.m. Reserve your place by registering now at 757-7437.

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• The \$1.1 billion appropriated investment of taxpayer dollars returns over \$2.38 billion in benefits. This is one of the few programs available that delivers a significant two-for-one return of investment.

• Investment in DeCA is a good one — in FY03 DeCA was one of the first DoD agencies to receive a clean audit report by independent accounting firm KPMG.

• Commissaries sell a higher volume of groceries in half the average sales space, with fewer employees and less than half the operating hours of commercial counterparts.

Commissaries Support the Troops

During the early days of Operation Iraqi Freedom, commissary operations quickly filled grocery orders amounting to more than 130,000 cases for Navy ships stores and Army and Air Force exchanges overseas. In Germany, the Ansbach commissary was able to fill an order from the local military health clinic for nearly 38,000 sandwich bags in conjunction with smallpox inoculations — and at an additional 23 percent savings through product discounts. Those needed goods

were swiftly delivered through a commissary pipeline that was already on the ground and running strong.

Enhancing Quality of Life at Home and Abroad

The Defense Department’s Social Compact, reaffirming America’s commitment to its service members, recognizes military quality of life as a core competency of the Department and includes the commissary benefit as an integral component. As such, the commissary benefit plays a huge role in fulfilling the compact by enhancing military quality of life:

• Commissaries extend the purchasing power of military families by providing groceries at cost plus 5 percent. Average savings of more than 30 percent over commercial grocery stores translates into an improved standard of living for a family of four — to the tune of almost \$2,700 a year.

• Commissaries provide a safe place to shop and a sense of community at military installations.

• Commissaries provide stability when military members are deployed and families are left behind.

• Commissaries contribute to family readiness by enabling families to locate and live with their

military sponsors worldwide.

• Commissaries provide a “taste of home” for service members and their families wherever they serve by providing American grocery products, the prices, and food chain safety assurance worldwide.

These quality of life considerations become particularly important overseas where local exchange rates, foreign languages, unfamiliar food products and dangerous conditions can limit the number of acceptable grocery shopping alternatives.

What this adds up to is a commissary benefit that functions as a core element of military family support, not only contributing to quality of life, but impacting retention and recruitment as well. Any cutbacks in support to the commissaries would undermine quality of life and would only be viewed as an erosion of the commitment of our nation to our military families who make exceptional personal sacrifices all the time — but especially during this time of war.

Our service men and women and their families deserve to have a commissary benefit second to none. It’s part of the care, service and support they have come to expect.